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Changes to Agriculture Related Ministries in Korea

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Report Highlights:

Korean President Park Geun-Hye was sworn in as the 18th President of the Republic of Korea on February 25, 2013. On March 22, 2013, after contentious debate, the National Assembly passed the president's proposal to restructure the government - Government Restructure Bill. Out of a total of 212 Assemblymen in attendance, 188 voted in favor of the bill, 11 opposed and 13 withdrew from voting. The Prime Minister publicly announced the bill as law on March 23, 2013 after the cabinet meeting.

General Information:

President Park Geun-Hye was sworn in as the 18th President of the Republic of Korea on February 25, 2013. The President proposed a bill to restructure the government prior to her inauguration. However, it wasn't until March 22, 2013 that the National Assembly passed the Government Restructure Bill. Out of a total of 212 Assemblymen in attendance, 188 voted in favor of the bill, 11 opposed and 13 withdrew from voting. The Prime Minister publicly announced the bill as law on March 23, 2013 after the cabinet meeting.

The law changes the government structure from the current 15 Ministries, 2 Agencies and 18 Administrations to 17 Ministries, 3 Agencies and 17 Administrations. With respect to agriculture, the former Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries' responsibilities for fisheries and for meat safety inspection were transferred to other ministries. A summary of key changes made to Ministries directly affecting agriculture follows.

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (MAFRA, formerly called the Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries): The literal translation from Korean to English of the Ministry's name is the 'Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock and Food.' As can be seen, the biggest change to this Ministry is the fact that the work related to fisheries will be shifted to the newly created Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries. Also, the work related to food safety inspection for livestock, agriculture and fisheries has moved to the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety. Over 250 meat and fishery inspection personnel as well as administrative personnel from MAFRA will transfer to the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety. MAFRA will continue to carry out work related to animal and plant diseases (similar to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)) but will not conduct meat inspection (similar to FSIS). The new Minister of MAFRA, Dr. Dong Phil LEE, spent his career at the Korea Rural Economic Institute (KREI) and was President of KREI before being nominated as the Minister.

Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (MFDS, formerly called the Korea Food and Drug Administration): Although it will be called a Ministry, the literal translation is 'Food and Drug Safety Agency.' As it has been enlarged from an Administration under the supervision of the Minister of Health and Welfare to an Agency level that is under the supervision of the Office of Prime Minister, it will be headed at the Ministerial level. MFDS will be able to revise and enact provisions and standards related to its work on its own, whereas in the past, all legal regulatory work was officially carried out by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. In addition to its previous responsibility for standard setting and inspection of food products, it now takes up the responsibility for standard setting and inspection of all food, fisheries, and meat products. The new Minister is Seung CHUNG, spent his entire official career working at the Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries before retiring as a Vice Minister in June, 2011.

Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (MOF): This Ministry was an independent Ministry before it was merged into the former Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries by former President Myung Bak Lee. President Park promised during her election campaign that she would revive the Ministry. The Ministry is responsible for work related to the domestic fishery industry and is delegated by MFDS the responsibility for inspection of fishery products marketed domestically as well as those for export.

Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE): President Park publically stated that it is her belief that the responsibility for bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations of the government should be in the hands of the Ministry that overlooks industry. The government restructuring reflected this belief and moved the work related to bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations from the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. All bilateral trade talks and FTA negotiations will now be led by this Ministry.